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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE

HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER, MARITIME, AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM

AND

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT

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Chairman Cuellar, Chairman Carney, Ranking Member Souder, Ranking Member Bilirakis, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a privilege and an honor to appear before you today to discuss SBI*net*. I am Mark Borkowski, Executive Director of the Secure Border Initiative, and with me today is Acting Chief of the United States Border Patrol, Michael Fisher.

Departmental-Wide Assessment

Before I begin to discuss where we are with SBI*net* development, I want to briefly discuss the Department-wide reassessment that was ordered by the Secretary back in January. As the Governor of Arizona, Secretary Napolitano became uniquely aware of the promises that were made about SBI*net* and the shortfalls it has faced. When she came into the Department, she took a hard look at our progress with SBI*net*. She gave my team at CBP a fair chance to prove that we were on the right track. She asked hard questions about the future of the program and the feasibility of where we were headed and directed then-Acting Commissioner Jayson Ahern to provide his assessment of the path forward for SBI*net*. Based upon the results of that review, she ordered a Department-wide reassessment of the program to determine if there are alternatives that may more efficiently, effectively and economically meet our nation's border security needs.

The Department-wide review is motivated by two major considerations. The first is that the continued and repeated delays in SBI*net* raise fundamental questions about SBI*net*'s viability and availability to meet the need for technology along the border. The second is that the high cost of SBI*net* obligates this administration to conduct a full and comprehensive analysis of alternative options to ensure we are maximizing the impact and effectiveness of the substantial taxpayer resources we are devoting to border security technology. Quite frankly, this type of investment can only be justified if you know exactly what you are going to get, and this type of comprehensive analysis of alternatives should have been undertaken years ago. Secretary Napolitano recognized the need for such due diligence, which is why we will conduct such an analysis under the review she ordered.

The assessment has an immediate and a long-term phase. This week, the Department announced that it will be redeploying $50 million in Recovery Act funds that were scheduled to be spent on SBInet to alternative currently available, stand-alone technology, such as remote-controlled camera systems called Remote Video Surveillance Systems (RVSSs), truck-mounted systems with cameras and radar called Mobile Surveillance Systems (MSSs), thermal imaging devices, ultra-light detection, backscatter units, mobile radios, and cameras and laptops for pursuit vehicles, that will immediately improve our ability to secure the U.S.-Mexico border.

In the long-term phase, we will conduct a comprehensive, science-based assessment of alternatives to SBInet to ensure that we are utilizing the most efficient and effective technological and operational solutions in all of our border security efforts. If this analysis suggests that the SBInet capabilities are worth the cost, this administration will extend deployment of these capabilities. If this analysis suggests that alternative technology options represent the best balance of capability and cost-effectiveness, this administration will immediately begin redirecting resources currently allocated for border security efforts to these stronger options.

Role of Technology

It has often been said that technology is one of three "pillars" that contribute to effective border security, with tactical infrastructure, such as physical fencing, and personnel being the other two. Physical fencing provides "persistent impedance"—that is, it delays the progress of people who attempt to cross our borders between the ports of entry. These delays, in turn, provide more opportunity for our Border Patrol agents to respond to and interdict those attempts. From 2006 through 2008, the bulk of our funding within SBI focused on completion of the physical fence along areas of the southwest border where Border Patrol determined it was operationally necessary. Since then, as that fence has largely been completed, we have shifted our funding focus more towards technology.

Technology is primarily used to provide continual monitoring and surveillance of a particular area, enhancing situational awareness for Border Patrol agents, detecting activity between the ports of entry and providing information about the type of activity (i.e. human or animal, vehicle or pedestrian, transporting contraband or not transporting contraband, etc.). This knowledge assists our Border Patrol agents in responding to and interdicting criminal activity, and enhances their safety by giving them information about the relative threat of any group or individual and about how best to approach the threat.

CBP has already deployed technology to several specific areas of the border. As mentioned above, we have deployed Remote Video Surveillance Systems (RVSSs), which allow personnel to keep an eye on selected areas by displaying pictures at a central dispatch location. We have also deployed Mobile Surveillance Systems (MSSs), which transmit radar and camera images to a terminal in the cab of the truck where they are monitored by an operator. Finally, we have deployed Unattended Ground Sensors (UGS), which can detect movement in their vicinity. All of these systems provide important information to the Border Patrol about activity in a particular area.

The goal of SBI*net* was to network a set of sensors that cover a wide area into a Common Operating Picture, or COP – in contrast to the individual, stand-alone systems described above, which are very useful and relatively inexpensive, but also labor-intensive and limited in coverage. By depicting a large amount of information in a small space, SBInet was designed to allow fewer personnel to monitor and direct operations across a larger area. Border Patrol agents would be able to observe, manage, and respond to multiple events more effectively.

SBI*net* Block 1

With respect to the development progress of SBI*net*, it is clear to all who are paying attention that progress has been slower than anticipated. Recent testing results suggests that SBI*net* Block 1 has demonstrated some progress, but the time it has taken us to get to this point is extremely discouraging and frustrating. As a partial mitigation to the delays, we worked with Boeing to make a change in our plans so that the Border Patrol could use parts of the system that are not yet fully complete "as is" while engineering work continued. The Border Patrol has been using these parts of the system in this capacity since February 6th and the feedback has been positive from agents on the frontlines. The next steps involve completing our engineering work and

conducting formal testing. We expect to conduct System Acceptance Testing through August, and then to turn the system over to the Border Patrol for formal Operational Testing and Evaluation starting in September.

Construction on a second part of the system, known as Ajo-1, started on January 25th. Ajo-1 was delayed for several reasons, including technical concerns and environmental considerations — Ajo-1 is located in an environmentally sensitive area, so we have worked very closely with the Department of the Interior to ensure that we protected it appropriately. Much of the Ajo-1 AoR should be constructed by this spring. By August, we expect to complete construction of Ajo-1. We will then conduct acceptance and operational testing of Ajo-1 through the end of this calendar year.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, we recognize that the SBI*net* program has been a frustration. This Committee and the entire Congress has been supportive and patient with us as we have worked through issues and delays encountered by the program. The comprehensive review ordered by Secretary Napolitano demonstrates that she shares your concern. Technology along the border is of critical importance to our national security and the safety and effectiveness of our Border Patrol agents working in the field. We need to ensure that we provide them with proven, cost-effective tools that will help them do their jobs and keep our nation safe – whether that means large scale networks like SBInet or the inexpensive, stand-alone technology I mentioned above. One thing is clear: the Secretary's review will require all of us to go back and take a hard look at the assumptions that were made in the past, and it will ensure that we proceed in a manner that both bolsters the security of our nation's borders while making the most out of the resources that have been devoted to technology solutions to our border security challenges. We look forward to answering your questions.